



## MANAGING ELECTRONIC MAIL

On the Record with  
the Indian Affairs Records  
Management  
Program



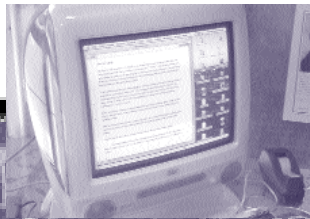
**ELECTRONIC MAIL... E-MAIL...RECORDS...  
NON-RECORDS... PRESERVE... DESTROY...  
WHAT DO YOU DO?**

All employees (and contractors) are required by law to make and preserve records containing adequate and proper documentation of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, and essential transactions of the agency. In addition, the records must be properly stored and preserved, available for retrieval, and subject to appropriate approved disposition schedules.

The Federal Records Act applies to e-mail records just as it does to records that are created using other media. If you create or receive e-mail messages during the course of your daily work, you are responsible for ensuring that you properly manage them.

The Department's current e-mail policy requires that all e-mails or attachments that meet the definition of a Federal record be added to the organization's files by printing them (including the essential transmission data) and filing them with related paper records.

Remember—electronic mail is intended for official and authorized purposes. You must exercise common sense, good judgment, and propriety when using this government resource. E-mail messages are not private and can be used in court as evidence.



**WHAT IS AN E-MAIL MESSAGE?**

An e-mail message consists of any document created, transmitted, or received on an e-mail system, including message text and any attachments, such as word-processing documents, spreadsheets, and graphics that may be transmitted with a message, or with an envelope containing no message.

**WHEN ARE E-MAIL DOCUMENTS RECORDS?**

E-mail documents are records when they:

- Are created or received in the transaction of agency business
- Are appropriate for preservation as evidence of the government's function and activities, or
- Are valuable because of the information they contain

**WHEN ARE E-MAIL DOCUMENTS NOT RECORDS?**

E-mail documents are non-records when they:

- Provide no evidence of agency functions and activities
- Lack information of value
- Duplicate information already documented in existing records

### **WHAT ARE MY RESPONSIBILITIES?**

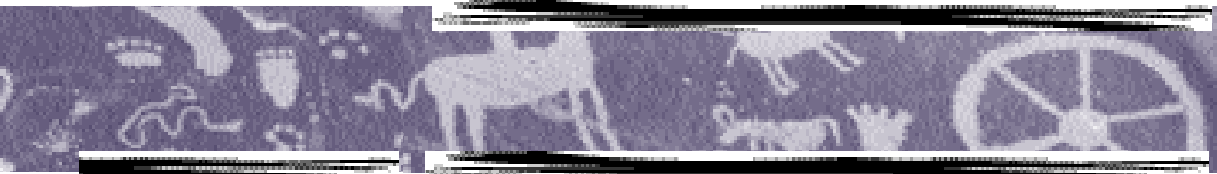
You are responsible for properly managing the creation, retention, and disposition of records that you send or receive on an e-mail system. You must:

- As soon as possible after you receive or send a message—and any attachments—determine whether it is a record or a non-record
- Print a hard copy of the record, including attachments and transmission information, and file it in the official filing system
- Except as noted under “Anything Else I Need to Know” delete the e-mail version of the record unless you need it for reference purposes
- Except as noted under “Anything Else I Need to Know” delete messages or attachments that are not records as soon as they have served their purposes

### **WHAT ABOUT NON-RECORDS... WHAT DO I DO WITH THEM?**

You should promptly delete non-record messages. If non-record copies are useful for reference or convenience, you should copy the information to the hard drive of your computer or to a diskette. Examples of non-records include:

- Copies of memoranda or text sent for information rather than action
- Instruction memoranda or information bulletins where the recipient is not the action office
- Messages that have only temporary value such as a message that a meeting time has changed



### **IF I FILE MY E-MAIL MESSAGE IN A FOLDER I'VE CREATED IN MY E-MAIL SYSTEM DO I STILL HAVE TO PRINT IT AND FILE IT IN THE OFFICE'S FILING SYSTEM?**

Yes. E-mail folders are part of the e-mail system and cannot be part of an official filing system because the e-mail system is protected by use of an individual password accessible only to you. Remember, records must be available for retrieval and access by those who need them.

### **WHAT ABOUT COPIES OF DOCUMENTS ON MY LAPTOP COMPUTER... ARE THEY RECORDS?**

All documents (e-mail, word processing, spreadsheets, etc.) on a laptop that meet the definition of a record are considered to be separate documents from similar documents maintained on the computer in your office until they are synchronized and identical.

**WHAT HAPPENS TO THE STATUS OF MY E-MAIL MESSAGE AFTER I PRINT IT AND FILE IT IN THE OFFICE'S FILING SYSTEM?**

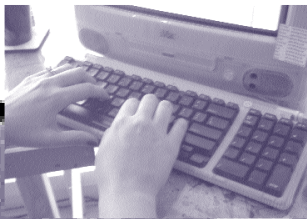
A message that is a record becomes a non-record after the hard copy has been printed and properly retained.

**CAN I USE E-MAIL ON MY GOVERNMENT COMPUTER TO SEND PERSONAL MESSAGES?**

While electronic mail systems often replace telephones to relay information to individuals, you may not use the system for unofficial personal matters except for those approved uses of government telephone systems. These uses include:

- Calls relating to injuries, sickness, or medical appointments
- Calls relating to unplanned schedule changes—delays by business or transportation problems, need to work overtime
- Brief daily calls to/from spouse or minor children or those responsible for children
- Calls to/from locations that can be reached only during working hours—banks, repair services to car or home

You must delete these messages immediately after they have served their purpose.



**ANYTHING ELSE I NEED TO KNOW?**

Litigation may create special document retention requirements, including the saving of printed and electronic versions of e-mail. To the extent that your office is involved in litigation, please be aware of any directives or instructions specific to the litigation or check with the Solicitor's office.

## **E-MAIL CHECKLIST**

### **AN E-MAIL MESSAGE IS A RECORD IF**

- ☒ It contains unique, valuable information developed in preparing position papers, reports, studies, etc.
- ☒ It reflects significant actions taken in the course of conducting business
- ☒ It conveys unique, valuable information about government programs, policies, decisions, or essential actions
- ☒ It conveys statements of policy or the rationale for decisions or actions
- ☒ It documents oral exchanges (in person or by telephone), during which policy is formulated or other government activities are planned or transacted
- ☒ It adds to the proper understanding of the formulation or execution of government actions or of government operations and responsibilities
- ☒ It documents important meetings
- ☒ It facilitates action by government officials and their successors in office
- ☒ It makes possible a proper scrutiny by the Congress or other duly authorized agencies of the Government
- ☒ It protects the financial, legal, and other rights of the Government and of the persons directly affected by the Government's actions

### **MANAGE YOUR E-MAIL**

- ☒ Determine if the e-mail message/attachments meet the legal definition of a record
- ☒ Print a hard copy of the record, including attachments and transmission information, and file it in the official filing system
- ☒ Delete the e-mail version of the record unless you need it for reference purposes
- ☒ Delete messages or attachments that are not records as soon as they have served their purpose

If you're unsure about the correct status of a message, always treat it as a record first.

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR NEED HELP  
TO DETERMINE IF AN E-MAIL MESSAGE IS A  
RECORD CONTACT THE  
INDIAN AFFAIRS RECORDS MANAGEMENT  
PROGRAM AT  
505-346-7950 OR BY E-MAIL TO  
IARM@os.doi.gov**

Office of the Special Trustee  
for American Indians



Bureau of Indian Affairs

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RECORDS  
MANAGEMENT

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